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Glossary of terms

Terminology in the 'transgender' field is varied and constantly shifting as our understanding and perceptions of gender variant conditions changes. The concept of a 'normal' gender expression associated with a binary man/woman paradigm is, in itself, questionable. In addition, in writing such a glossary of terms there is a risk of merely creating further stereotypes.

Gender identity

Gender identity describes the psychological identification of oneself as a boy/man or as a girl/woman. There is a presumption that this sense of identity will evolve along binary lines and be consistent with the sex appearance.

Sex

Sex refers to the male/female biological development – the phenotype. In an infant, the sex is judged entirely on the genital appearance at birth. Other phenotypic factors such as karyotype (chromosomal configuration) are seldom tested unless a genital anomaly is present. There is a presumption that an apparently male infant will identify as a boy, and vice versa.

Gender role

The *gender role* is the social role – the interaction with others which both gives expression to the inner gender identity and reinforces it. Despite the greater gender equality in mod-

ern Western culture in terms of the subjects studied in school and at university; the choice of friends; work and domestic arrangements; dress and leisure pursuits, there is still a presumption of conformity with society's 'rules' about what is appropriate for a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, especially in terms of appearance. Too great a transgression often causes anxiety and discomfort in those who witness it.

Gender variance/ gender dysphoria / gender identity disorder

It is now understood that the innate gender identity, although powerfully influenced by the sex of the genitalia and the gender of rearing, is not determined by these factors. There is evidence that sex differentiation of the brain may be inconsistent with other sex characteristics, resulting in individuals dressing and/or behaving in a way which is perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms; these unusual gender expressions may be described as *gender variance*. Where conforming with these norms causes a persistent personal discomfort, this may be diagnosed as *gender dysphoria*. In many, this includes some level of disgust with the phenotype, since this contradicts the inner sense of gender identity. Gender dysphoria is not a popular term with those experiencing the condition since it has become associated with the DSM-IV 'clinical diagnosis' *gender identity disorder*; both these descrip-

tions imply a diagnosis of 'pathology' and mental illness, whereas the more neutral term, *gender variance* denotes that these departures from stereotypical gender experience and expression are part of a natural, albeit unusual, human development.

Transsexualism

When gender variance is experienced to the degree that medical intervention is necessary to facilitate a permanent transition to a gender role that accords with the gender identity thus alleviating the intense discomfort, it may be regarded as transsexualism. In the UK, legal protections and the right to a new legal identity, are accorded to those described as intending to undergo, undergoing or having undergone permanent gender reassignment, under medical care.

Gender confirmation treatment

Those transitioning permanently usually have gender confirmation treatment that includes hormone therapy and often surgery to bring the sex characteristics of the body more in line with the gender identity. Such surgery is sometimes referred to as gender reassignment surgery.

Transgender

Transgenderism has had different meanings over time, and in different societies. Currently, it is used as an inclusive term describing all those

whose gender expression falls outside the typical gender norms; for example, those who cross-dress intermittently for a variety of reasons including erotic factors (transvestism), as well as those who live continuously outside gender norms, sometimes with, and sometimes without, medical intervention. There is a growing acknowledgement that although there is a great deal of difference between say, a drag artist and a transsexual person, there are nonetheless areas in the transgender field where the distinctions are more

blurred; for example, a person who cross dresses intermittently for some years, may later transition fully to the opposite role.

Trans men and trans women

The expression 'trans' is often used synonymously with 'transgender' in its broadest sense. Sometimes its use is specific; for instance, those born with female phenotype but identifying as men may be referred to as 'trans men'; and those born with male phenotype but identifying as

women may be referred to as 'trans women'. Where trans people have transitioned permanently, many prefer to be regarded as ordinary men and women.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is a separate issue from gender identity. Trans people may be gay, straight, bisexual or, occasionally, asexual. Their sexual relationships may remain the same through the transition process, or they may change.